



On Authority; On Political Indifferentism

Today we have two short pamphlets, one by Engels and one by Marx, one on “Authority” and one on “Indifferentism”, compiled together in one document, attached, and downloadable via the link below.

Says Engels: Either the anti-authoritarians don't know what they're talking about, in which case they are creating nothing but confusion; or they do know, and in that case they are betraying the movement of the proletariat. In either case they serve the reactionaries.

This was written in 1872 and published in 1874, in Italy. It is a “classic” because it addresses a familiar argument, still found today. The “politically correct” of the day were saying that all forms of “authority” were bad and must be done away with. Engels corrects this “politically correct” error.

Marx, writing in 1873, also for eventual publication in Italy in 1874, addresses what he calls “Political Indifferentism”. In this pamphlet, Marx first quotes Proudhon, and readers can be deceived to think that Marx is approving of Proudhon. But this

is only polemic. Marx quotes Proudhon extensively, only so as, all the more thoroughly, to contradict him.

This is a very profound lesson of Karl Marx's. What he is saying is that although, under the bourgeois dictatorship, in the bourgeois democracy, whose choices are all bourgeois choices, yet we cannot therefore say that we should have nothing to do with it, and refuse to choose.

On the contrary, we have to study it with more attention than anyone else, and make the tactically right choices in the interest of the working class.

In South Africa in the early 21st century, clearly the communists are deeply involved in the politics of the bourgeois state, and Marx would, according to this text, say that such involvement is more than inevitable: It is deliberate and it is right. The communists cannot remain indifferent to what the bourgeoisie is doing.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Engels, On Authority, 1872; Marx, Political Indifferentism, 1873.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)